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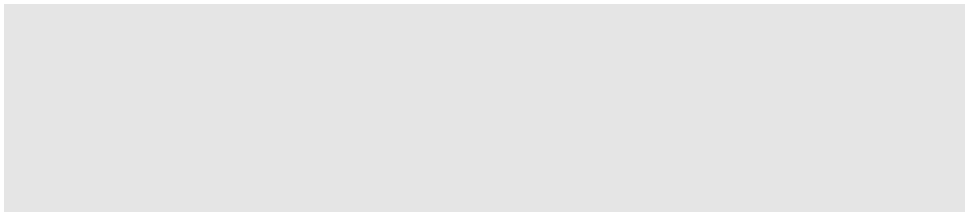
'Blasphemy' girl moves to Canada

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ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani Christian girl who was arrested for alleged blasphemy last year and forced into hiding for fear of her life has moved to Canada, an activist said yesterday.

Rimsha Masih could have faced life in prison if convicted over allegations that she set fire to pages of the Qur'an in the poor, run-down neighborhood where she lived on the edge of Islamabad.

She was arrested last August and spent three weeks on remand in one of Pakistan's toughest jails in a case that drew widespread international condemnation.

She was released on bail and the case against her was quashed in November, but she and her family were forced into hiding, living under government protection in fear of their lives.

But a Christian activist in Pakistan said yesterday that Rimsha and her close relatives had moved to Canada.

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"Rimsha and her family have arrived in Canada," Sajid Ishaq said.

"The Canadian government is supporting them. They are presently doing a foundation course to learn basic English," he said.

Basharat Masih, a Pakistani policeman who said he had been assigned to Rimsha's protection, also confirmed that they had left.

"They are being taken care of by the Canadian government and attending church services," he said.

Blasphemy is an extremely sensitive issue in Pakistan, where 97 percent of the population is Muslims.

Insulting the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) can be punished by death.

Even unproven allegations can provoke a violent public response and activists say the legislation is often used to settle personal disputes.

Local media said Rimsha was as young as 11, but an official medical report classified her as "uneducated" and 14 years old, but with a mental age younger than her years.

Pakistani Christian leaders last year paid tribute to Muslim clerics, members of the media and civil society for highlighting the injustice done to Rimsha.

A promotional graphic for job openings in Saudi Arabia and the GCC. At the top, it says "SAUDI IS HIRING!" in large green letters. Below that, it states "Over 3,000 jobs in Saudi and the GCC on our jobs portal". The center features a map of Saudi Arabia composed of many small, colorful icons representing various professions. To the right of the map, it says "ARAB NEWS". At the bottom left, there is a green button that says "CLICK HERE". At the bottom right, it says "In partnership with" followed by the "bayt" logo.

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Cleric Hafiz Mohammed Khalid Chishti has been accused of desecrating the Qur'an and tampering with the evidence against her.

In 2011 politicians Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti were assassinated for demanding that the blasphemy law be reformed.

Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, remains in prison after being sentenced to death in November 2010 after other women claimed she made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammed.

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